

A Romance of Love and Adventure That Is Ordinarily Told and Will Hold the Reader's Attention From the Opening Chapter

The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY

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The People in the Story are Real and Not Puppets, and the Plot Mr. Tracy Has Woven About Them is Most Ingenious

CONTINUED FROM LAST SUNDAY

Jenks understood, of course, that the real danger would arise when they visited the scene of the Dyak's disaster. Even then the wavering balance of chance might cast the issue in his favor. He could only wait, with ready rifle, with the light of battle glowering in his eyes. Of one thing at least he was certain—before they conquered him he would levy a terrible toll.

He glanced back at Iris. Her face was pale beneath its mask of sun brown.

The chief was listening intently to the story of the Dyak who saw the lead man totter and fall. He gave some quick order. Followed by a score

or more of his men, he walked rapidly to the foot of the cliff where they found the lifeless body.

Jenks stole one more hasty glance at Iris. The chief and the greater number of his followers were out of sight behind the rocks. Some of them must now be climbing to that fatal ledge. Was this the end?

Iris bent forward sufficiently in her sheltering niche to permit her to gaze with wistful tenderness upon Jenks. She knew he would dare all for her sake. She could only pray and hope.

Suddenly a clamor of discordant yells fell upon her ears. Jenks rose to his knees. The Dyaks had discovered their refuge and were about to open fire. He offered them a target best perchance Iris were not thoroughly screened.

"Keep close," he said. "They have found us. Lead will be flying around soon."

She flinched back into the crevice; the sailor fell prone. Four bullets sped into the ledge, of which three pierced the tarpaulin and one flattened itself against the rock.

Then Jenks took up the tale. So cautiously constituted was this man that,



The Dyak hurried through the air.

although he ruthlessly shot the savage who first spied out their retreat, he was swayed only by the dictates of stern necessity. There was a feeble chance that further bloodshed might be averted. That chance had passed. Very well. The enemy must start the dreadful game about to be played. They had thrown the gage, and he answered them. Four times did Jenks' rifle carry death, unseen, almost unthought, across the valley.

Ere the fourth Dyak collapsed limply where he stood others were there, firing at the little puff of smoke above the grass. They got in a few shots, most of which sprayed at various angles off the face of the cliff. But they waited for no more. When the lever of the Lee-Metford was shoved home for the fifth time the opposing crest was bare of all opponents save two, and they lay motionless.

The fate of the flanking detachment was either unperceived or unheeded by the Dyaks left in the vicinity of the house and well. Astounded by the firing that burst forth in midair, Jenks had cleared the dangerous rocks before they realized that here, above their heads, were the white man and the maid whom they sought.

With stupid zeal they blazed away furiously, only succeeding in showering fragments of splintered stone into the eagle's nest. And the sailor smiled. He quietly picked up an old coat, rolled it into a ball and pushed it into sight amidst the grass. Then he squirmed round on his stomach and took up a position ten feet away. Of course those who still carried loaded guns discharged them at the bundle of rags, whereupon Jenks thrust his rifle beyond the edge of the rock and leaned over.

Three Dyaks fell before the remainder made up their minds to run. Once continued, however, that running was good for their health, they moved with much celerity. The remaining cartridges in the magazine slackened the pace of two of their number. Jenks dropped the empty weapon and seized another. He stood up now and sent a quick reminder after the rearward pirate. The others had disappeared toward the locality where their leader and his diminished troop were gathered, not daring to again come within range of the whistling dum-dums. The sailor, holding his rifle as though pleasant shooting, bent forward and sought a belated opponent, but in vain. There was no sound save the wailing of birds, the soft sigh of the sea and the yelling of the three wounded men in the house, who knew not what terrors threatened and vainly bawled for succor.

Again Jenks could look at Iris. Her face was bleeding. The sight maddened him.

"My God!" he groaned. "Are you

wounded?"

She smiled bravely at him.

"It is nothing," she said—"a mere splash from the rock which cut my forehead."

He dared not go to her. He could only hope that it was no worse, so he turned to examine the valley once more for vestige of a living foe.

CHAPTER XII.

THOTCH his eyes, like live coals, glowered with sullen fire at the strip of sand and the rocks in front, his troubled brain paid perfunctory heed to his task. The stern sense of duty, the ingrained force of long years of military discipline and

solidly thought, compelled him to keep watch and ward over his fortress, but he could not help asking himself what would happen if Iris were seriously wounded.

There was one enemy more potent than these skulking Dyaks, a foe more irresistible in his might, more pitiless in his strength, whose assaults would tax to the utmost their powers of resistance. In another hour the sun would be high in the heavens, pouring his ardent rays upon them and drying the blood in their veins.

Hitherto the active life of the island, the shade of trees, but or cave, the power of unrestricted movement, and the possession of water in any desired quantity robbed the tropical heat of the day of its chief terrors. Now all was changed. Instead of working amid grateful foliage they were bound to the brown rock, which soon would glow with radiated energy and give off scorching gusts like unto the opening of a furnace door.

This he had foreseen all along. The tarpaulin would yield them some degree of uneasy protection, and they both were in perfect physical condition. But if Iris were wounded! If the extra strain brought fever in its wake! That way he saw nothing but blank despair, to be ended for her by delirium and merciful death, for him by a Berserker rush among the Dyaks and one last mad fight against overwhelming numbers.

Then the girl's voice reached him, sent relief almost cheerful:

"You will be glad to hear that the cut has stopped bleeding. It is only a scratch."

So a kindly Providence had spared them yet a little while. The cloud passed from his mind, the gathering mist from his eyes. In that instant he thought he detected a slight rustling among the trees where the chief shivered up from the house. Standing as he was on the edge of the rock, this was a point he could not guard against.

When her welcome assurance recalled his scattered senses he stepped back to speak to her, and in the same instant a couple of bullets crashed against the rock overhead. Iris had unwittingly saved him from a serious, perhaps fatal, wound.

He sprang to the extreme right of the ledge and boldly looked into the trees beneath. Two Dyaks were there, belated wanderers cut off from the main body. They dived headlong into the undergrowth for safety, but one of them was too late. Jenks' rifle reached him, and its reverberating concussion, tossed back and forth by the echoing rocks, drowned his parting scream.

In the plenitude of restored vigor the sailor waited for no counter demonstration. He turned and crouchingly approached the southern end of his parapet. Through his screen of grass he could discern the long black hair and yellow face of a man who lay on the sand, and twisted his head around the base of the farther cliff. The distance, of measured, was ninety yards, the target practically a six inch bulls-eye. Jenks took careful aim, fired, and a whiff of sand flew up.

Perhaps he had used too fine a sight and plowed a furrow beneath the Dyak's ear. He only heard a faint yell, but the enterprising head vanished, and there were no more volunteers for that particular service.

He was still peering at the place when a cry of unmitigated anguish came from Iris:

"Oh, come quick! Our water! The casks have burst!"

It was not until Jenks had torn the tarpaulin from off their stores and he was wildly striving with both hands to scoop up some precious drops collected in the small hollows of the ledge that he realized the full magnitude of the disaster which had befallen them.

During the first rapid exchange of fire before the enemy vacated the cliff several bullets had pierced the tarpaulin. By a stroke of exceeding bad fortune two of them had struck each of the water barrels and started the staves. The contents quietly ebbed away beneath the broad sheet and, flowing inward by reason of the sharp slope of the ledge, percolated through the fault. Iris and he, notwithstanding their frenzied efforts, were not able to save more than a pint of gritty discolored fluid. The rest, infinitely more valuable to them than all the diamonds of De Beers, was now oozing through the natural channel cut by centuries of storm, dripping upon the headless skeleton in the cave, soaking down to the very heart of their buried treasure.

Jenks was so paralyzed by this catastrophe that Iris became alarmed. As yet she did not grasp its awful significance. That he, her hero, so brave, so confident in the face of many dangers, should betray such sense of irredeemable loss frightened her much more than the incident itself.

Her lips whitened. Her words became incoherent.

"Tell me," she whispered. "I can bear anything but silence. Tell me, I implore you. Is it so bad?"

The sight of her distress sobered him. He ground his teeth together as a man does who submits to a painful

operation and resolves not to flinch beneath the knife.

"It is very bad," he said; "not quite the end, but near it."

"The end," she bravely answered, "is death! We are living and uninjured. You must fight on. If the Lord wills it we shall not die."

He looked in her blue eyes and saw there the light of heaven. Her glance did not droop before his. In such moments heart speaks to heart without concealment.

"We still have a little water," she cried. "Fortunately we are not thirsty. You have not forgotten our supply of champagne and brandy?"

He could only fall in with her unreflective mood and leave the dreadful truth to its own evil time. In their little nook the power of the sun had not yet made itself felt. By ordinary computation it was about 3 o'clock. Long before noon they would be grilling. Throughout the next few hours they must suffer the torture of Dives with one meager pint of water to share between them. Of course the wine and spirit must be shunned like a pestilence. To touch either under such conditions would be courting death, apoplexy and death. And next day!

He lightened his jaws before he answered:

"I will console ourselves with a bottle of champagne for dinner. Meantime, while I hear our friends shouting to those left on this side of the island, I must take an active interest in the conversation."

He grasped a rifle and lay down on the ledge, already gratefully warm. There was a good deal of sustained shouting going on. Jenks thought he recognized the chief's voice giving instructions to those who had come from Snugglers' cove and were now standing on the beach near the quarry.

"I wonder if he is hungry," he thought. "If so, I will interfere with the commissariat."

Iris peeped forth at him.

"Mr. Jenks!"

"Yes," without turning his head. He knew it was an ordinary question.

"May I come too?"

"What, expose yourself on the ledge?"

"Yes, even that. I am so tired of sitting here alone."

"Well, there is no danger at present. But they might chance to see you, and you remember what I said."

"I remember quite well. If that is all," there was a rustle of garments. "I am very mannish in appearance. If you promise not to look at me I will join you."

"I promise."

Iris stepped forth. She was flushed a little, and, to cover her confusion, maybe, she picked up a rifle.

"Now there are two guns," she said as she stood near him.

He could see through the tail of his eye that a slight but elegantly proportioned young gentleman of the sea-faring profession had suddenly appeared from nowhere. He was glad she had taken this course. It might better the position were the Dyaks to see her thus.

"The moment I tell you you must fall flat," he warned her. "No ceremony about it. Just flop!"

"I don't know anything better calculated to make one flop than a bullet," she laughed. Not yet did the tragedy of the broken kegs appeal to her.

"Yes, but it achieves its purpose in two ways. I want you to adopt the precautionary method."

"Trust me for that. Good gracious!"

The sailor's rifle went off with an unexpected bang that froze the exclamation on her lips. Three Dyaks were attempting to run the gantlet to their beleaguered comrades. They carried a jar and two wicker baskets. He with the jar fell and broke it. The others doubled back like hares, and the first man dragged himself after them. Jenks did not fire again.

Iris watched the wounded wretch crawling along the ground. Her eyes



The sailor's rifle went off with an unexpected bang.

grew moist, and she paled somewhat. When he vanished she looked into the valley and at the opposing ledge; three men lay dead within twenty yards of her. Two others dangled from the rocks. It took her some time to control her quivering utterance sufficiently to say:

"I hope I may not have to use a gun. I know it cannot be helped, but if I were to kill a human being I do not think I could ever rest again."

"In that case I have indeed murdered sleep today," was the unfeeling reply.

"No, no! A man must be made of sterner stuff. We have a right to defend ourselves. If need be, I will exercise that right. Still, it is horrid, oh, so horrid!"

She could not see the sailor's grim smile. It would materially affect his rest for the better were he able to slay every Dyak on the island with a single shot. Yet her gentle protest pleased him. She could not at the same time be callous to human suffering and be Iris. But he declined the discussion of such sentiments.

"You were going to say something when a brief disturbance took place," he inquired.

"Yes, I was surprised to find how hot the ledge has become."

"You notice it more because you are obliged to remain here."

After a pause she said:

"I think I understand now why you were so upset by the loss of our water supply. Before the day ends we will be in great straits, enduring agonies from thirst!"

"Let us not meet the devil halfway," he rejoined. He preferred the unfair retort to a confession which could only foster dismay.

"But, please, I am thirsty now."

"He moved uneasily. He was only too conscious of the impish weakness, common to all mankind, which creates a desire for cheer in the face of adversity. Already his own throat was parched. The excitement of the early struggle was in itself enough to engender an acute thirst. He thought it best to meet their absolute needs as far as possible."

"Bring the tin cup," he said. "Let us take half our store and use the remainder when we eat. Try to avoid breathing through your mouth. The hot air quickly affects the palate and causes an artificial dryness. We cannot yet be in real need of water. It is largely imagination."

Iris needed no second bidding. She carefully measured out half a pint of the unsavory fluid—the drops of the casks and the scourgings of the ledge.

"I will drink first," she cried.

"No, no," he interrupted impatiently.

"Give it to me."

"She pretended to be surprised.

"As a mere matter of politeness—"

"I am sorry, but I must insist."

She gave him the cup over her shoulder. He placed it to his lips and gulped steadily.

"There," he said gruffly. "I was in a hurry. The Dyaks may have another rush at any moment."

Iris looked into the vessel.

"You have taken none at all," she said.

"Nonsense!"

"Mr. Jenks, be reasonable! You need it more than I. I don't want to live without you."

His hands shook somewhat. It was well there was no call for accurate shooting just then.

"I assure you I took all I required," he declared, with unnecessary vehemence.

"At least drink your share to please me," she murmured.

"You wished to humbug me," he grumbled. "If you will take the first half I will take the second."

And they settled it that way. The few mouthfuls of tepid water gave them new life. Nevertheless by high noon they were suffering again. The time passed very slowly. The sun rose to the zenith and filled the earth and air with his ardor. It seemed to be a miracle—now appreciated for the first time in their lives—that the sea did not dry up and the leaves wither on the trees. The silence, the deadly inaction of all things, became intolerable. The girl bravely tried to confine her thoughts to the task of the hour. She displayed alert watchfulness, an instant readiness to warn her companion of the slightest movement among the trees or by the rocks to the northwest, this being the arc of their periphery assigned to her.

Looking at a sunlit space from cover and looking at the same place when sweltering in the direct rays of a tropical sun are kindred operations strangely diverse in achievement. Iris could not reconcile the physical senselessness of the hour with the careless hardness of the preceding days. Her eyes ached somewhat, for she had tilted her sun-wester to the back of her head in the effort to cool her throbbing temples. She put up her right hand to shade the too vivid reflection of the glistening sea and was astounded to find that in a few minutes the back of her hand was scorched. A faint sound of distant shouting disturbed her painful reverie.

"How is it," she asked, "that we feel the heat so much today? I had hardly noticed it before."

"For two good reasons—forced idleness and radiation from this confounded rock. Moreover, this is the hottest day we have experienced on the island. There is not a breath of air, and the hot weather has just commenced."

"Don't you think," she said huskily, "that our position here is quite hopeless?"

They were talking to each other sideways. The sailor never turned his gaze from the southern end of the valley.

"It is no more hopeless now than last night or this morning," he replied.

"But suppose we are kept here for several days?"

"That was always an unpleasant probability."

"We had water then. Even with an ample supply it would be difficult to hold out. As things are, such a course becomes simply impossible."

Her despondency pierced his soul. A slow agony was consuming her.

"It is hard, I admit," he said. "Nevertheless you must bear up until night falls; then we will either obtain water or leave this place."

"We may be compelled to do both."

"But how?"

In this his hour of extremest need the man was vouchsafed a shred of luck. Before he could frame a feeble pretext for his too sanguine prediction a sampan appeared 500 yards from Turtle beach, strenuously paddled by three men. The vague hallooing they had heard was explained.

The Dyaks, though to the manner born, were weary of sun scorched rocks and salt water. The boat was coming in response to their signals, and the sight inspired Jenks with fresh hope. Like a lightning flash came the reflection that if he could keep them away from the well and destroy the sampan now hastening to their assistance, perhaps conveying the bulk of their stores, they would soon tire of slaking their thirst on the few pitcher plants growing on the north shore.

"Come quick!" he shouted, adjusting the back sight of a rifle. "Lie down and aim at the front of that boat, a little short if anything. It doesn't matter if the bullets strike the sea first."

He placed the weapon in readiness for her and commenced operations himself before Iris could reach his side. Soon both rifles were pitching twenty shots a minute at the sampan. The result of their long range practice was not long in doubt. The Dyaks danced from seat to seat in a state of wild excitement. One man was hurled overboard. Then the craft lurched seaward in the strong current, and Jenks told Iris to leave the rest to him.

Before he could empty a second magazine a fortunate bullet ripped a plank out of the sampan filled and went down amid a shrill yell of execration from the back of the cliff. The two Dyaks yet living endeavored to swim ashore, half a mile through shark-infested reefs. The sailor did not even trouble about them. After a few frantic struggles each doomed wretch flung up his arms and vanished. In the clear atmosphere the onlookers could see black fins cutting the pellucid sea.

They were quieting down—the thirst fiend was again slowly salting their veins—when something of a dirty white color fluttered into sight from behind the base of the opposite cliff. It was rapidly withdrawn, to reappear after an interval. Now it was held more steadily and a brown arm became visible. As Jenks did not fire, a turbaned head popped into sight. It was the Mohammedan.

"No shoot it," he roared. "Me English speak it."

"Don't you speak Hindoostanee?" shouted Jenks in Urdu of the higher proficiency.

"Yes, sir," was the joyful response. "Will your honor permit his servant to come and talk with him?"

"Yes, if you come unarmed."

"And the chief, too, sahib?"

"Yes, but listen! On the first sign of treachery I will shoot both of you from the outset. The chief obeyed, with a scowl, and the two advanced to the foot of the rock.

"Stand close to me," said Jenks to Iris. "Let them see you plainly; but pull your hat well down over your eyes."

She silently followed his instructions. Now that the very crisis of their fate had arrived she was nervous, shaken, conscious only of a desire to sink on her knees and pray.

The two halted some ten paces in front of the cavern, and the belligerents surveyed each other. It was a fascinating spectacle, this drama in real life. The yellow faced Dyak, gaudily attired in a crimson jacket and sky blue pantaloons of Chinese silk, a man young and powerfully built, and the brown skinned, white clothed Mohammedan, bony, tall and gray with hard-looked up at the occupants of the ledge. Iris, slim and boyish in her male garb, was dwarfed by the six foot sailor, but her face was blood stained, and Jenks wore a six weeks' stubble of beard. Holding their rifles with alert ease, with revolvers strapped to their sides, they presented a warlike and imposing tableau in their inaccessible perch. In the path of the emissaries lay the bodies of the slain. The Dyak leader scowled again as he passed them.

"Sahib," began the Indian, "my chief, Taung S'Ali, does not wish to have any more of his men killed in a foolish quarrel about a woman. Give her up, he says, and he will either leave you here in peace or carry you safely to some place where you can find a ship manned by white men."

"A woman!" said Jenks scornfully. "That is idle talk! What woman is here?"

This question nonplused the native.

"The woman whom the chief saw half a month back, sahib."

"Taung S'Ali was bewitched. I slew his men so quickly that he saw spirits."

The chief caught his name and broke in with a question. A volley of talk between the two was enlivened with expressive gestures by Taung S'Ali, who several times pointed to Iris, and Jenks now anatomized his thoughtless folly in permitting the Dyak to approach so near. The Mohammedan, of course, had never seen her and might have persuaded the other that in truth there were two men only on the rock.

His fears were only too well founded. The Mussulman saluted respectfully and said:

"Protector of the poor, I cannot gain say your word, but Taung S'Ali says that the maid stands by your side and is none the less the woman he seeks in that she wears a man's clothing."

"He has seen a man, but his heart is

added," retorted the sailor. "Why does he come here to seek a woman who is not of his race? Not only has he brought death to his people and narrowly escaped it himself, but he must know that any violence offered to us will mean the extermination of his whole tribe by an English warship. Tell him to take away his boats and never visit this island again. Perhaps I will then forget his treacherous attempt to murder us while we slept last night."

The chief glared defiantly, while the Mohammedan said:

"Sahib, it is best not to anger him too much. He says he means to have the girl. He saw her beauty that day, and she inflamed his heart. She has cost him many lives, but she is worth a sultan's ransom. He cares not for warships. They cannot reach his village."

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